



**IN THE MATTER OF THE DEATH OF A FEMALE
IN CONNECTION WITH AN INVESTIGATION BY MEMBERS OF THE
STL'ATL'IMX TRIBAL POLICE AND THE RCMP
IN THE TOWN OF LILLOOET, BRITISH COLUMBIA
ON 29 FEBRUARY, 2020**

**DECISION OF THE CHIEF CIVILIAN DIRECTOR
OF THE INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS OFFICE**

Chief Civilian Director:	Ronald J. MacDonald, Q.C.
IIO File Number:	2020-044
Date of Release:	June 29, 2020

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Introduction

On the morning of February 29, 2019, several police officers from the RCMP and the Stl'at'imx Tribal Police responded to a report that the Affected Person ('AP') in this case had threatened suicide. The Subject Officer ('SO') was the first to locate AP, who fled when approached. AP drove her vehicle into the Fraser River, where it sank almost to its roof, and officers were unable to extract AP from the vehicle before she drowned. Because there had been police involvement in the incident in which AP took her own life, the Independent Investigations Office ('IIO') was notified and commenced an investigation. The narrative that follows is based on evidence collected and analyzed during the investigation, including the following:

- statements from SO, three witness police officers and one civilian witness;
- police Computer-Aided Dispatch ('CAD') and Police Records Information Management Environment ('PRIME') records from both the RCMP and from the Stl'at'imx Tribal Police;
- copies of AP's texts to a relative; and
- scene examination and photographic evidence.

Pursuant to section 17.4 of the Memorandum of Understanding between the IIO and BC Police Agencies, officers who are the subject of an investigation are not compelled to submit their notes, reports and data. In this case, SO agreed to participate in an interview with IIO investigators as well as a videotaped walk-through at the scene.

Narrative

On the morning of February 29, 2019, Civilian Witness 1 ('CW1') received texts and a phone call from AP, saying goodbye to family members and that she was going to jump from a bridge. AP had an unfortunate history involving suicidal ideation. CW1 contacted SO, told SO about AP's suicidal intentions and provided the information that AP was believed to be driving a small red car. At 7:55 a.m., SO, a member of the Stl'at'imx Tribal Police, called the Lillooet RCMP detachment and asked for an RCMP member to assist. SO also called Witness Officer 1 ('WO1'), another Tribal Police officer, and briefed him. By 8:10 a.m., WO1 was able to inform SO that the RCMP were responding. WO2, an RCMP member, had been dispatched to search for AP.

In an interview with IIO investigators, SO described going out to look for AP, and "brainstorming" with CW1 about where AP might be located. CW1 suggested looking in a particular spot by the Fraser River, just south of Lillooet, called 'the Pits' by locals. SO

went to that location, and at 8:40 a.m. saw AP's car parked beside gravel flats along the river. SO texted CW1 with this information.

SO went to the passenger side door of AP's car and tried to open it, but it was locked. SO told investigators that AP immediately drove away:

She looked at me ... and then she just put the car in reverse, and she backed up, and then she put the car into drive and then she just took off. I heard and saw her car hit rocks on the undercarriage.

SO followed AP, driving down onto the exposed rocky river bed toward the river. When AP's car next came into view, SO said, it was already in the river. As SO parked and went to the river's edge, the water was "about six inches below the passenger window". Taking off boots and coat, SO waded out into the water up to about hip depth, "trying to get to the car", but could not reach it.

SO had broadcast by radio that AP had been located at "the Pits", and had driven off. WO1 and WO2 heard the broadcast, but WO2 was not familiar with that location and was not immediately able to determine where SO was calling from. A minute later, at 8:41 a.m., SO radioed again to say that AP had driven into the river. WO1 activated his emergency lights and siren and drove to the scene.

As WO1 arrived on scene he saw AP's red car almost submerged, "forty or fifty yards" out in the river, with SO wading out into the water trying to reach the car. The tracks from AP's car were visible on the beach, leading directly into the river. WO1 called to SO to come back to the shore, and radioed for Fire and Rescue services to attend, and for a boat. That transmission went out at 8:44 a.m. WO1 then stripped off his duty equipment and struggled out to the sinking car himself, but by the time he reached the car he was chest-deep in the water.

WO1 told investigators that he listened, but could not hear anything from inside the car. He tried to open the door, but it was locked. He looked inside to see if AP was still in an air pocket, but seeing that the car was full of water to the roof, he smashed the right front window with a baton. WO1 tried to unlock the door by reaching inside, but by now he was feeling the effects of the frigid water, and felt he was on the verge of passing out. He was forced to return to the shore. He was later treated in hospital for the after-effects of hypothermia and a cut hand.

CW1 told IIO investigators that when she arrived at the scene she saw AP's car out in the river. SO was there, and told CW1 that AP had gone "flying into the river".

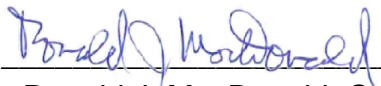
Rescue personnel using safety lines and dry suits were able to extract AP from the car at 9:40 a.m. Attempts by firefighters and paramedics to revive her continued until 11:23 a.m., when AP was pronounced deceased.

Legal Issues and Conclusion

The purpose of any IIO investigation is to determine whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that an officer, through an action or inaction, may have committed any offence in relation to an incident resulting in serious harm or death.

SO responded swiftly and appropriately to the information that AP was intending to commit suicide—an intention that is confirmed by the evidence of CW1 and the record of text messages from AP. SO was the first officer to locate AP, but it is clear that AP was not willing to be prevented from carrying out her plan, and there was nothing SO could have done to prevent AP from driving away and into the river. SO then tried to reach the sinking car in the ice cold water, but was unable to do so. WO1, too, did everything that could have been expected of him. Both officers acted commendably by risking their own lives without safety equipment in the frigid waters of the Fraser River in February, trying to save someone who was determined not to be saved.

Accordingly, as the Chief Civilian Director of the IIO, I do not consider that there are reasonable grounds to believe that an officer may have committed an offence under any enactment and therefore the matter will not be referred to Crown counsel for consideration of charges.



Ronald J. MacDonald, Q.C.
Chief Civilian Director

June 29, 2020

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